Northern Great Plains Network

Inventory and Monitoring Monthly Report

February 2005

Highlights from February 9th Technical Committee Meeting: The highlights from the recent Technical Committee meeting are below. All recommendations were approved by the Board of Directors on February 17th.

- There is agreement to pursue integration of I&M, Fire Effects, and EPMT, but no consensus on the details. I encourage everyone to keep thinking about how to maximize efficiency and collaboration of these programs.

- Dr. Troelstrup's Water Quality project will be funded an additional $19k for purposes of another sampling run.

- Two Biological Technicians will be hired to assist Amy Symstad in testing and comparing various methods of collecting vegetation data, i.e., types of plots.

- There was agreement to hold the Vital Signs workshop this September (I have tentatively picked Sept. 14 and started contacting key participants).

- An administrative person for the I&M Program will be hired late in FY05.

- The I&M Program will move to an interim office starting this fall.

- An Aquatic Ecologist and a Plant Ecologist will be hired as soon as FY06 funds are available (assuming full funding). Other potential expenditures with FY06 funds include setting aside funds for park-specific monitoring projects and/or acquiring air quality or weather monitoring equipment (pending further assessment of needs) and/or acquisition of vehicles.

NPSpecies and Data Certification: Marcia Wilson is working with species experts to develop a certified list of species for each park. The experts are relying on their personal knowledge, as well as the voucher, observation, and reference information in NPSpecies to certify the draft lists. Once the expert has reviewed the list it is shared with park staff for final review. We've had several cases where parks have commented that they knew of such-and-such observation that was not reflected in the list developed by the expert. That is why we need parks to review the list. It is also why parks should be recording these observations in NPSpecies. If these observations are not captured in a centralized database (i.e., NPSpecies) they will be lost. Please continue to enter noteworthy records in NPSpecies. Talk to Marcia if you need guidance on how to do that.

National I&M Meeting in Austin TX: The national I&M meeting was held in Austin Texas the same week as the Northern Great Plains I&M meetings. Joel Brumm attended the national meeting. He reports that it was an information-rich conference with sessions on park/network relations, the role of the I&M Networks, data management, quantitative

ecology, communication, and many other topics. Conference presentations are at: http://science.nature.nps.gov/im/monitor/meetings/Austin_05/austin.htm. One highlight of the conference was the completion of the Phase III plans for the first 12 funded networks. A recurring theme of the conference was the role of the networks, e.g., who specifically would be utilizing the information the networks will generate, how is that information effectively communicated, and what role do Networks play in park operations.

Vital Signs Plan: The Northern Great Plains Network Phase I monitoring plan will be distributed to parks in early March for review. Comments need to be received by March 21. Assuming all goes well, it will be submitted to the Washington office by the end of the month.

Listening With Your Feet: In the Fall 2004 issue of *Conservation in Practice* the author Alan Burdick tells of the amazing ability of animals to "listen" with their feet. For example, research has shown that an elephant can use its feet to "hear" another elephant stomping its feet from as far as 20 miles away! Although elephants listening with their feet may seem to have nothing to do with Northern Great Plains parks, there may be a connection. For example, several parks have bison and we know that bison herds can create a seismic roar or rumble that even we humans can detect. It's not inconceivable to think that bison may communicate using seismic waves. If so, what are the affects of a train rumbling by? Similarly, researchers have found that burrowing mammals and even insects appear to communicate by seismic waves. Does that semi-truck disrupt their behavior and even their survival? Or does it just give them a splitting headache. As we consider various Vital Signs we need to recognize that many processes in nature operate at levels we can barely comprehend or "hear." The challenge for us in picking Vital Signs is to not only think like ecologists, but also to think like a bison! (The full article can be found at http://www1.nature.nps.gov/im/units/ngpn/index.htm.)